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ABSTRACT

The works of G. D. Wilson and F. N. Kerlinger have suggested different theories to explain liberalism and conservatism. Wilson presents a bipolar dynamic theory of conservatism based on a general conservative syndrome factor. Kerlinger presents a duality view of liberalism and conservatism based on the critical referent theory of attitudes. A study conducted using questionnaires to assess predisposition to liberal and conservative attitudes surveyed 160 undergraduates at a small state-supported college in the Pacific Northwest. Each respondent completed the Liberalism-Conservatism Social Concept Scale developed for the study. A principal components analysis was performed and a total of 12 components were retained: (1) human rights, (2) social liberalism, (3) pro-nuclear freeze, (4) science, (5) religious/national issues, (6) government involvement, (7) rules and punishment, (8) economy, (9) marriage and family, (10) capitalistic leadership, (11) religious/social issues, and (12) traditional institutions. The intercorrelations of the 12 components were subjected to a second-order component analysis. One component reflected liberal attitudes and the remaining two second-order components reflected conservative attitudes. The low intercorrelations between the second-order factors are supportive of Kerlinger's duality views and the independence of liberal and conservative attitudes. The one exception to this involved the pro-nuclear freeze component. (AS)

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Liberalism and Conservatism: An Assessement of the Duality Viewpoint

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Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Western Psychological Association, Long Beach, California, April 23, 1987

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ABSTRACT

Wilson (1973) presents a bipolar dynamic theory of conservatism based on a general conservative syndrome factor. Kerlinger (1984) presents a duality view of liberalism and conservatism as orthogonal modes of thinking. The purpose of this paper is to assess the validity of the bipolarity and the duality view of liberalism and conservatism. Participants were 160 undergraduates at a small state-supported college in the Pacific Northwest. Each respondent completed the Liberalism - Conservatism Social Concept Scale developed for this study. A principal components analysis with direct oblimin oblique rotation was performed and a total of 12 components were retained. The intercorrelations of these 12 components were subjected to a second-order component analysis. One component reflected liberal attitudes and the remaining two second-order components reflected conservative attitudes. The low intercorrelations between the second-order factors are supportive of Kerlinger's duality views and the independence of liberal and conservative attitudes. The one exception to this involves the pro-nuclear freeze component.

The study of conservatism and liberalism dates back to the early work of Thurstone (1934), Kulp and Davidson (1934), Carlson (1934) and Ferguson (1939). Reviews of research on liberalism and conservatism and theoretical interpretations of this literature may be found in Wilson (1973), Eysenck and Wilson (1978) and Kerlinger (1984). Reviews of measurement procedures may be found in Shaw and Wright (1967) and Robinson and Shaver (1973).

The work of Wilson (1973) and Kerlinger (1984) has been particularly helpful in evolving our present understanding of the psychology of conservatism and liberalism from both empirical and theoretical perspectives. Kerlinger (1984) has provided conceptual definitions of liberalism and conservatism based on a representative review of writings by supporters of the two ideologies. Liberalism was defined as a

> "set of political, economic, religious, educational, and other social beliefs that emphasizes freedom of the individual, consitutional participatory government and democracy, the rule of law, free negotiation, discussion and tolerance of different views, constructive social progress and change, egalitarianism and the rights of minorities, secular rationality and rational approaches to social problems, and positive government action to remedy social deficiencies and to improve human welfare." (p.15)

Conservatism was defined as a

> "set of political, economic, religious, educational and other social beliefs characterized by emphasis on the status quo and social stability, religion and morality, liberty and freedom, the natural inequality of men, the uncertainty of progress and

> the weakness of human reason. It is further characterized by distrust of popular democracy and majority rule and by support of individualism and individual initiative, the sanctity of private property and the cental importance of business and industry in the society." (p. 16-17)

While Wilson (1973) did not provide conceptual definitions, the characteristics of a conservative were much more specific and easier to operationalize. Wilson has presented eight characteristics of the "ideal" conservative as a stereotyped image along with empirical evidence to evaluate the appropriateness of these characteristics. These eight conservative characteristics include: (a) religious fundamentalism, (b) pro-establishment politics, (c) insistence on strict rules and punishment, (d) pro-militarism, (e) ethnocentrism and intolerance of minority groups, (f) preference for the conventional in art, clothing and other institutions, (g) anti-hedonistic outlook and restriction of sexual behavior, and (h) opposition to scientific progress. Wilson provides no description of an ideal liberal.

Wilson (1973) presents a dynamic thoery of conservatism based on a general conservative syndrome factor measured by two referent scales he developed for this purpose. Kerlinger (1984) has been critical of the bipolar theories and methods of measuring liberalism and conservatism which are typified by the work of Wilson and others. He argues convincingly for a duality view of liberalism and conservatism based on the criterial referent theory of attitudes. Thus, Kerlinger (1984) views liberalism and conservatism as orthogonal modes of thinking and provides evidence of their existence as such, using second order factor analysis and analysis of covariance structures. The bipolarity of liberal and

conservative thinking is generally dismissed by Kerlinger as an artifact of the measurement process used by other reasearchers. The second purpose of this study was to assess the validity of the bipolarity and the duality views of liberalism and conservatism.

The work of Wilson (1973) and Kerlinger (1984) suggests nine areas for social assessment which should comprehensively reflect liberal and conservative thinking. These nine areas are (a) religion, (b) politics and government, (c) economy, (d) rules and punishment, (e) military, (f) minority groups, (g) conventional institutions (such as art, clothing, education), (h) sexual roles and behavior, and (i) scientific progress. Since the scales developed by Wilson and Kerlinger, or those reviewed in Shaw and Wright (1967) or Robinson and Shaver (1973), do not appear to be comprehensive in assessing all nine areas of social attitudes, a new liberalism-conservatism scale was developed for this study. This questionnaire assessed the predisposition to provide preferential responses to liberal and conservative concepts. If the bipolarity hypothesis of liberalism and conservatism is correct, a significant negative relationship should exist between the liberal components and the conservative components for this questionnaire. If the duality hypothesis is correct, no significant relationship should be found.

METHOD

Participants and Design

Participants were 160 undergraduates at a small state-supported college in the Pacific Northwest. Students enrolled in introductory psychology, introductory sociology and upper-division courses in

business, education and nursing volunteered to take part in this study during regular class time. Males comprised 41% and females 59% of the sample with ages ranging from 17 to 55. The median and mean ages were 22 and 25.2 respectively with a standard deviation of 8. A total of 71% of the sample was single and 92% were Caucasian. Each participant responded to the questionnaire which took about 15 minutes to complete.

Measurement Scale

The Liberalism-Conservatism Social Concept Scale (L-CSCS) utilized the referent item approach which was demonstrated to be effective by Wilson and Patterson (1968) and Kerlinger (1972). The L-CSCS presented words and phrases as stimuli for respondents to evaluate on a six-point scale varying from highly positive (+3) to highly negative (-3). No response was coded as a zero. A total of 90 referents were used to assess preferential responses to liberal and conservative concepts which spanned the nine areas previously discussed. Half of these referents were considered liberal and half conservative based on research reviewed by Kerlinger (1984) and recent writings on this topic in newspaper editorials, news magazines and other lay publications. The determination of liberal and conservative attitude subscores was based on a principal component analysis to be discussed in the results section.

RESULTS

Analysis of L-CSCS

A principal components analysis with a direct oblimin oblique rotation was performed on the L-CSCS using the SPSSX statistical package. A total of twelve components were retained based on the interpretation of

the scree plot of the eigenvalues. These twelve components accounted for 50.8% of the total variance. The intercorrelations of these twelve oblique components were subjected to a second-order principal component analysis. Three components were extracted with eignvalues greater than one and these were also rotated using the SPSSX oblimin procedure. One second-order component reflected liberal attitudes with loadings from four initial components. The remaining two second-order components reflected conservative attitudes. The twelve initial components, labeled and grouped according to their second-order analysis, are presented in Tables 1 and 2. Only items with pattern values greater than or equal to .35 were considered significant and thus are reported. The values greater than .35 from the pattern matrix of the second-order analysis are presented in Table 3.

Insert Tables 1, 2, and 3 about here

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study basically replicate the findings and conclusions of Kerlinger (1984). The first-order components of the social attitudes assessed by the L-CSCS primarily had loadings on either liberal concepts or conservative ones. Component bipolarity was a rare occurrence at the first-order item level. The second-order component analysis resulted in one liberal and two conservative components which fit the expectations in the literature. The duality theory appears to be clearly supported by the present study.

The only notable exception to the duality view involved the pro-nuclear freeze/arms control factor which was bipolar in its component loadings and which appeared in both liberal and conservative second-order factors. Given public opinion polls which indicate that sentiment in the U.S. is overwhlemingly in favor of bilateral nuclear freeze, this finding is not too surprising. This aspect of the militaristic component of conservative thinking needs to be reassessed in future research.

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Table 1

Liberal Components of Liberal-Conservative Social Concept Scale

Human Rights	Social Liberalism
racial equality (.75)	socialized medicine (.58)
equality of women (.70)	rock music (.53)
Blacks (.55)	sexual freedom (.45)
desegregation (.52)	peaceful coexistence (.39)
feeling (.52)	social welfare (.35)
human rights (.48)	
civil rights (.48)	
equal opportunity employment (.46)	Science
career women (.42)	scientific research (.60)
international cooperation (.41)	scientific theory (.57)
consumer protection (.40)	high technology (.57)
peaceful coexistence (.39)	love (.41)
private property (.38)	cooperation (.35)

Pro-Nuclear Freeze/Arms Control

no first use of nuclear weapons (-.58)	international cooperation (-.38)
arms control (-.57)	competition (.37)
latest fashions (.51)	
domination (.48)	
collective bargaining (-.42)	
nuclear retaliation (.41)	
bilateral nuclear freeze (-.40)	

Table 2

Conservative Components of Liberal-Conservative Social Concept Scale

Second Order Conservative Component I

Religious/National Issues

military parity (-.63)
national security (-.56)
church (-.51)
American dream (-.47)
religion (-.44)
Christian (-.42)
tradition (-.37)
military foriegn aid (-.35)
high school athletics (-.35)

Economy

management expertise (-.79)
individual initiative (-.63)
free enterprise (-.62)
management-employee cooperation (-.60)
profits (-.50)
small business (-.48)
collective bargaining (-.47)
employee input into company policy (-.42)
capitalism (-.37)

Rules and Punishment

discipline (-.61)
school discipline (-.61)
duty (-.56)
manners (-.44)
capital punishment (-.38)
authority (-.38)
tax shelters (.38)

Government Involvement

government price controls (.73)
government regulations (.71)
corporate industry (.49)
strict superivision of workers (.47)
social security (.43)
military foreign aid (.40)

Marriage and Family

back to basics in education (-.65)
small business (-.55)
marriage (-.41)
military superiority (.41)
equal opportunity employment (-.40)
career women (-.38)
sex education (-.37)
family (-.37)

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)

Second Order Conservative Component II	
Religious/Social Issues	Traditional Institutions
Christian (-.61)	work (-.62)
prayer in schools (-.57)	marriage (-.49)
teaching spiritual values (-.57)	employee input into company policy (-.42)
legalized abortion (.53)	law and order (-.40)
housewife (-.48)	social welfare (-.37)
sexual freedom (.45)	deterrance (-.35)
money (.45)	
American Indians (-.44)	
religion (-.43)	Capitalistic Leadership
church (-.43)	real estate (.47)
Creationism (-.41)	leadership (.45)
evolution (.39)	capitalism (.40)
human warmth (-.38)	
moral standards (-.36)	
compassion (-.36)	
Blacks (-.35)	

Table 3

Rotated Second-Order Components of Liberal-Conservative Social Concept Scale*

Component	Liberalism	Conservatism I	Conservatism II
Human Rights	.65	--	--
Social Liberalism	.58	--	--
Pro-Nuclear Freeze	-.60	-.40	--
Science	.41	--	--
Religious/National Issues	--	.65	--
Government Involvement	--	-.50	--
Rules and Punishment	--	.45	--
Economy	--	.43	--
Marriage and Family	--	.40	--
Capitalistic Leadership	--	-.43	.42
Religious/Social Issues	--	--	.73
Traditional Institutions	--	--	.51

*Only pattern loadings greater than .35 are reported.